



U.S. Senator Judd Gregg, Chairman

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

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HELP COMMITTEE HEARS LATEST ON BIODEFENSE EFFORTS

Chairman Gregg Inquires on our State of Preparedness

Washington, DC – Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions convened a hearing today on our nation's state of preparedness against biological attack. Chiefs of the Food and Drug Administration, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and National Institutes of Health updated members of the HELP Committee on their agencies' roles in the fight against bioterrorism.

"Our nation's biodefense systems have been a priority of our President and they have been a priority of our Committee. We are all aware of the threat a deadly virus in the hands of a terrorist or radical dictator represents to a strong, yet free nation such as our own. Today we heard from some of the generals in the war against bioterrorism to determine if the efforts thus far in protecting our nation from this kind of threat have been effective and what more must be done to make our nation even more secure," said Senator Gregg.

Particular areas of concern that were raised today include public health workforce issues, coordination between agencies, and the state of the smallpox vaccination program.

"The government must be competitive in attracting the best and the brightest in the field of public health. With the growing demand for experts and specialists in the public health sector, we must sweeten the pot, so to speak, to make sure the government can compete with the private sector in attracting, training, and maintaining the talent we need to shore up our nation's security," said Senator Gregg.

"In the area of agency coordination, we must make sure our nation's security is not compromised because of the muddle of alphabet soup. Clear authority and lines of communication between offices and agencies must be established. And as equally important, it must be clear to the public who is in control and they would contact in an emergency. Our witnesses today confirmed that progress is being made and we congratulate them for this, but there is still more that can be done," said Senator Gregg.

"Our witnesses today confirmed the continued need for the Administration's smallpox vaccination program because the threat remains. We need a corps of first responders who are protected by vaccination so that they would be able to protect the population in the event of an actual attack. We look forward to the promised reinvigoration of the program," said Senator Gregg.

“The agencies represented here today and the entire Department of Health and Human Services have made Herculean efforts over the past year to protect our nation from bioterrorism. We appreciate their work. But we know there is more we can and must do. Major combat operations in Iraq may be over, and we might be going on two years without another terror attack on our own soil, but constant vigilance is the first principle of public health. We must continue to ask the hard questions about our preparedness,” said Senator Gregg.

Julie L. Gerberding, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mark B. McClellan, Commissioner of Food and Drugs, and Elias A. Zerhouni, Director of the National Institutes of Health testified at today’s hearing.

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